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A gentleman, eminent in the community as a Christian and a scholar, who has never manifested any desire to participate in political warfare, lately addressed to a friend the views of many of the intelligent christians and ardent lovers of freedom whom the publication has come to address.

New Haven, October 26, 1844.

CAN I CONSCIENTIOUSLY VOTE FOR HENRY CLAY?

For months past I had serious doubts on this subject; and if I had been called upon to decide, I should probably have declined to give Mr. Clay my vote. Subsequent inquiry has led me to change my views; and as there may be those who still cherish similar doubts, I would ask their attention to a few plain considerations, which have relieved my own mind on this subject.

To illustrate my present views, I will take a case which has publicly occurred. We all know, that William Wilberforce was a man of great consistency, and elevated Christian principle. For many years, he was the leader in the British parliament; and when William Pitt at the head of the British government brought Mr. Pitt during that very period, sought a duel, and through the influence of the Christian Patriarch, and often in the fraternal embrace of wine. How could Mr. Wilberforce be such a man, with a clear conscience?

The first answer is, He made a distinction between the Minister and the man; he felt that he could support Mr. Pitt in his public capacity, without giving the least sanction to the errors of his private life. Let us look at this distinction, and see if it is not founded in truth, and supported by common sense.

1. Mr. Pitt, with all his abilities, was still the mere *representative* of certain principles—the *organ* for carrying out a system of measures, which an immense body of men in Great Britain were desirous to support. Mr. Wilberforce was one of this body. He saw that these measures, which he deemed essential to the honor, the prosperity, and the religious interests of the country, must inevitably be sacrificed, if Mr. Pitt was put down. In voting as he did, he was, therefore, really

voting for these MEASURES, and not for the *man* in his individual capacity.

2. The *appointments to office* under Mr. Pitt, were certain, in Mr. Wilberforce's view, to be such, in general, as he and other conscientious men would approve; much more so than could be expected from his political opponents. He felt sure of having learned and upright judges, and able executive officers in the thousand posts of honor and trust, throughout the land—men whose private lives were superior, in most instances, to that of Mr. Pitt himself. Now this constitutes the *real* government of a country; and the case may happen, that one man who holds the appointing power, though pure himself in private life, may be led by party influences to give the people a corrupt government, while another of inferior personal character, may be induced or compelled by similar influences, to place them under the government of men, who are "a terror to evil doers, and the praise of them that do well." The question turns, not so much on the character of the man, as of the party which he represents; and Mr. Wilberforce in giving his vote, was *in fact* voting for ten thousand men whose character and principles he in general approved, and not for the single individual through whom they obtained office.

3. No man doubts, whether in pursuing the great ends of life, he may act *with* others whose private character he does not wholly approve. An apostle has decided the question, otherwise "must ye needs *go out of the world.*" No one hesitates to employ such men when necessary, as the *instruments* of accomplishing his designs. The captains of our ships and steamboats, and the agents of our numerous corporate institutions, are, in many cases, of this character. "Are they qualified for the particular duties of their station? Can they be relied on to carry out the design?" If so, though we should much prefer men whom we could approve in all things, we employ them without scruple. We sail in their ships, we entrust them with our property, we vote for them at meetings of stockholders, when we cannot find equally able men whom we approve in all things. We also make *compromises* with other stockholders, and take such men, when they will not give us others whom we should on the whole prefer. We do not abandon our property, and give up the interests committed to our charge, because those with whom we act, deny us all that we could wish on this subject. *We do what we can.* Mr. Wilberforce acted on this principle, and it enabled him to do much. If he had acted on the contrary principle, he would have done nothing.

4. Mr. Wilberforce felt, that no man in his senses could regard him, while acting on this principle, as giving any sanc-

E 400
C635

tion to the errors of Mr. Pitt in private life. No evil of this kind did *actually* result for the vote he gave. No one was ever led so entirely to misconstrue that vote, as to imagine that Mr. Wilberforce gave any sanction to dueling, sabbath-breaking, or intoxication, by his political connection with Mr. Pitt. Was he not, then, perfectly conscientious and upright in what he did? He made no sacrifice of character or principle, he gave not the slightest countenance to wrong-doing, while he stood firm at his post, and upheld that system of measures which he considered essential to the highest interests of his country.

Now the case presented by the approaching election of President, is precisely the same, except that Mr. Clay stands on much higher ground as to character, than Mr. Pitt did at the period in question. Many years ago, he fought a duel, but he now expresses his unqualified reprobation of the practice; he states, in substance, that he cannot conceive of any possible concurrence of circumstances which would now lead him to meet another in single combat; and he merely waives any *hypothetical* declarations, as ridiculous at his age, on a subject, which he supposes can never have any practical application to himself. The letters of Dr. Bascom and Dr. Chapman, distinguished divines residing in the same town, afford the fullest evidence, that Mr. Clay's moral character has been for some years at least, unimpeached in the community where he lives. He treats the institutions of religion with respect; he is not profane, not given to vicious indulgence. I say, then, that if Mr. Wilberforce was not guilty of a flagrant violation of his conscience, I can vote for Mr. Clay without wounding mine.

I feel too, that as Mr. Wilberforce went further, and considered himself *bound* in conscience to vote for Mr. Pitt, so am I bound, in the present momentous crisis, to vote for Mr. Clay. It is the only means left me, of resisting two of the greatest evils which can befal the United States, the utter prostration of the industry of the country, and the curse and dishonor of voluntarily enlarging the limits of slavery among a people, who in the charter of their liberties, have declared that "all men are free and equal." I could not throw away my vote in such a case, without feeling guilty before God and my country, of a flagrant breach of trust. In my oath, when I was made an elector, I solemnly promised, "whenever *called* to give my vote or suffrage, touching any matter which concerns this State or the United States, *to give it as I judge will conduce to the best good of the same.*" I feel that I *cannot* withhold it, without deep guilt, when "matter" of such solemn moment is submitted to the suffrage of the American people.

I feel, too, that the question, "who shall appoint the officers of government throughout the land," is one of vital interest. Neither Mr. Clay nor Mr. Polk, whichever is elected, has the power to do this at his own option. They must be governed by the party to which they belong. "Shall the appointments in Connecticut, for instance, be made under the counsel and advice of such men as Chief Justice Williams, or of Mr. Gideon Welles?" This is the practical question throughout the country. This question becomes one of pre-eminent importance, when we look at our courts of justice, and especially the Supreme Court of the United States. This tribunal is the great bulwark of the Constitution. For nearly fifty years, this court has been establishing a great system of principles and precedents, which are the stability of our political fabric. The question is, "Shall the decisions of that court be sustained, or set aside?" It is well known, that there is a class of lawyers, especially in the Middle and Southern States, who stand forth in utter opposition to the principles of Ellsworth, and Marshall, and Thompson, which have hitherto prevailed in that court. Quite a number of such men have been placed on the bench within the last ten years; and it requires the addition of only two or three more of the same principles, to give them the ascendency; and to upset at once the great principles of American law, as laid down and established during the progress of half a century. I bring no accusation against these men, but I state the fact, which they glory in proclaiming, that, if they gain the ascendency, *the system of American law must be, in a great measure, built up anew.* There are now two important vacancies in that court to be filled, and in the ordinary course of nature, one or two more vacancies may be expected in the coming four years. Who shall fill them? This question is far more important, than what particular man shall be President of the United States. Which set of principles shall prevail in that court? If Mr. Clay is elected, the principles of Marshall will be perpetuated. If Mr. Polk succeeds,—and he cannot do it, except through the supineness or the unfounded scruples of those who differ from him on these very points,—then the appointment will confessedly be made from among those who are bent on breaking down the great principles of American jurisprudence. Can any conscientious man, who maintains those principles, be concerned in producing such a result by withholding his vote?

These are some of the views which have led me to the conclusion, that I cannot in conscience deny my vote to Mr. Clay.

A Professed Christian.

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